

# 2 | The teacher from different aspects

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*“I believe teachers will be always needed. This is a flourishing profession, sometimes it is just a bud then a full-blown flower.”  
(Anonymous student respondent)*

## INTRODUCTION

The efficiency of the teachers has long been researched in pedagogical science. Significant works have tried to identify the main roles of teachers and the characteristic features of a good teacher. Generally the main issues are the influential factors affecting the educational process resulting in efficient students (Falus, 1998).

The present study summarises a two-year research carried out by the authors both jointly and separately with the teacher in the focus, examined from both professional and personal perspectives. Thus, in the following study, we provide a synthesis of the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research in the sequence of different teacher career stages. The issues can be grouped around two focal points. One is the personality of the teacher, and the other is the teachers' professional self. Among others, the main issues were the motivating factors for teachers choosing the teaching profession, their private life and career expectations, personal and job satisfaction, their concepts of the profession and their reflective practices, which provide a continuous analysis of the teaching process.

The study is structured into two major parts. The first part is about general professional aspects surveyed at three stages of the teaching career: students in teacher training/novice teachers, apprentice teachers and expert/mentor teachers. The second part of the present study concentrates on the apprentice teachers' reflective practices inside and outside the classroom.

## 1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

We formed four groups of questions and worded hypotheses in connection with the following questions:

1. *What are the motivating factors for choosing the teaching profession?*
2. *What are the career and personal life expectations and what is the level of job satisfaction?*
3. *The professional aspects of the apprentice teachers:*
  - *What do they think about their knowledge?*
  - *How do they perceive pedagogical situations?*
  - *How much professional support do they need in handling certain situations?*
  - *What resources do they use in problematic situations?*
  - *What qualities do they think essential for efficient teaching?*
4. *To what extent do apprentice teachers use reflective practices?*

The hypotheses answering the above questions are as follows:

H1: There are idealistic reasons and in some cases non normal motives operate when choosing the teaching profession (students, who cannot make their first choice for higher education, very often end up in teacher training institutes), and these reasons affect the teaching activity.

H2: Teachers believe that their career expectations will be/have been fulfilled.

H3: Teachers believe that their private life expectations will be/have been fulfilled.

H4: Apprentice teachers are problem sensitive and they can identify pedagogical problems.

H5: In problematic situations, apprentice teachers rely on academic knowledge gained during teacher training.

H6: Apprentice teachers use reflective practices both during and after the lesson.

H7: There is potential for the apprentice teachers to develop their reflective practices

## 2. METHODS

The pilot research includes:

- students in teachers' training (N=153),
- apprentice and mentor teachers (N=150, on average out of 228),
- apprentice teachers reflective practices (N=105).

For the above research, the authors designed questionnaires with open and closed questions and Likert scales. The questionnaires were distributed and filled in online.

### ***2.2.1. Teachers of three different career stages about the profession***

In helper professions, it is essential that fully trained experts with a strong professional calling and more than adequate personality are employed. Unfortunately these are not the most highly valued professions neither socially nor financially. It is believed, and in teachers' blogs it is often remarked, that many people pursue the teaching profession, who originally had not wanted to become a teacher and the situation is the same in many countries. To find information on the above issue, questionnaires were completed by teachers at three different career stages (students/novice teachers, apprentice and expert/mentor teachers). In the above mentioned two different questionnaires, questions were asked about the moti-

vating factors for choosing the teaching profession and the propensity for quitting it. Students currently in teacher training were asked why they had decided to be a teacher and if they intended to graduate as teachers. Apprentice and expert/mentor teachers were also asked why they had chosen the profession and if they would like to change careers.

In America Betty Steffy and Michael Wolfe divided the teaching career into six stages starting with the trainee period. According to them, the six stages are the following: novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished and emeritus. As the names of the different stages suggest, this is a continuous development, and each stage is built on the academic, personal, practical, in a word professional development of the former stage. Due to hardships and certain circumstances, a teacher can temporarily slip back to a former stage. This model suggests that the older the teacher is the better he or she is professionally. This should be the ideal way of any person's professional development. But real life is often far from ideal.

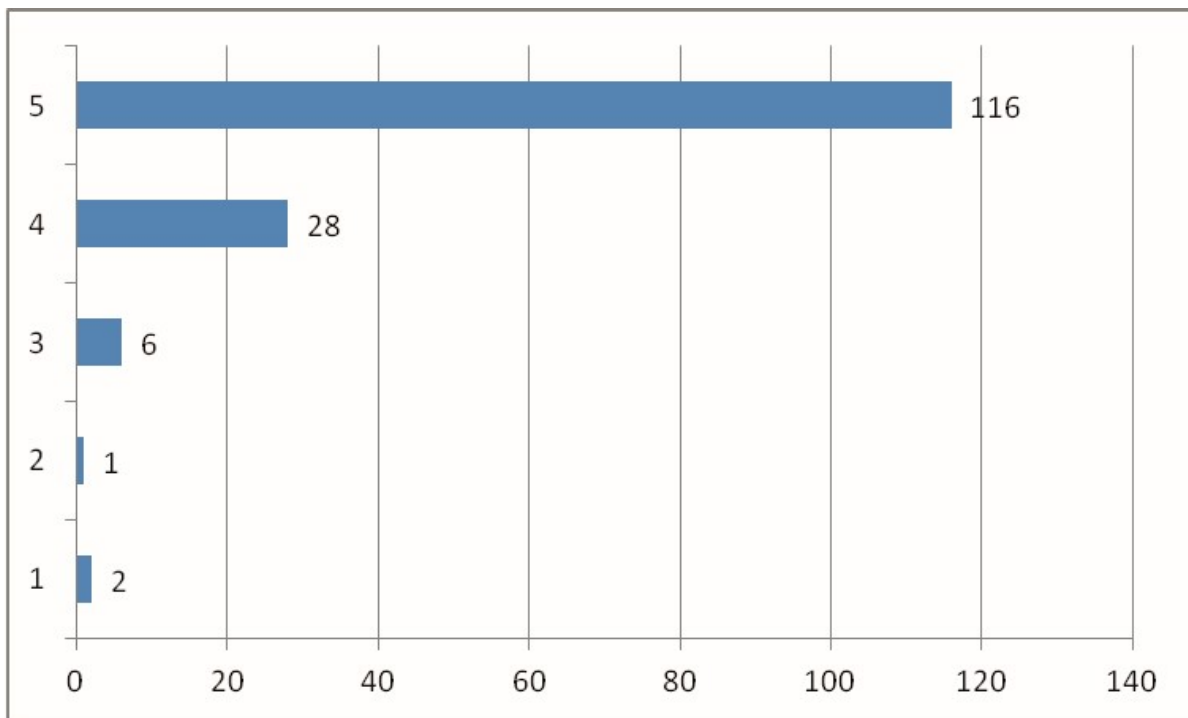
When speaking about helper professions, some heroism cannot be spared. One feels almighty, strong, and useful when people are being helped, taught, cured, and so on. We should believe that these are highly rewarding jobs. But reality does differ in many ways. In 1999, Barry Farber, professor of psychology and education at the Columbia University Teachers College, set up a "A Hypothetical Experiment" to describe the teaching profession:

"Imagine an experiment. The subjects are a group of professionals, mostly female. They are subject to the following conditions: They receive limited pay; have limited contact with other adults during a six-hour workday; have no access to phones and almost no privacy; and are responsible for the emotional, social, and intellectual welfare of large groups of children. They are regarded by society as necessary but also only marginally competent. They are expected to engender considerable growth in virtually every child they work with, even those whose parents have failed them. Individuals with no training in their field routinely review and critique their work.

The experimental manipulation: Society begins to grant these individuals somewhat better pay; there is a serious movement toward affording these individuals a greater voice in decisions that affect their work; and government as well as industry begins supporting efforts to create alternative means to do the work more creatively and efficiently. However, the experimental manipulation includes several other conditions as well: The public's expectations for success rises dramatically, and the criteria used for judging success also become more stringent with a greater emphasis placed on standardized tests; in fact, the public begins to believe that these individuals are not performing adequately unless every child in their charge is performing at an average level or higher." (Farber, 1999 p. 169)

In the following, the authors are going to highlight the findings of the two pilot studies in connection with the above-mentioned issues of the motivating factors for choosing the profession and the propensity for leaving it.

Students in teacher training were asked to mark how much they agree with the statement: "Not everybody can become a teacher; teachers need a strong vocation" (1-Strongly disagree–5-Strongly agree). As can be seen in Graph 1, the majority of the respondents believed that you must have a strong vocation to be a teacher and not everybody is suitable. It is a separate question whether they feel themselves capable or not.



**Graph 1** You need strong vocation to become a teacher; not everybody can become a teacher (N=153)

In the following let us analyse the answers for the following questions:

Q1: Why did you choose the teaching profession? (N=317)

**Table 1** Reasons for choosing the teaching profession

	Students/ novice teachers (N=152)	Apprentice (N=77)	Mentor (N=88)	All (N=317)
I like people/children	61	43	26	130
Decision was made on somebody's advice (family, friends, teachers)/role models	72	19	32	123
I always wanted to be a teacher	42	18	22	82
I enjoy passing on knowledge	7	19	15	41
My own decision	36	-	-	36
I like to help people	2	12	20	34
I had no other choice	16	1	15	32
I like the subject	7	7	11	25
I feel loved and acknowledged	2	7	11	20
The vicinity of the school	19	-	-	19
I like creativity and challenge	4	4	6	14
The good reputation of the school	10	-	-	10

As can be seen in Table 1, the answers could be organised into 12 categories. The table shows the frequency of the answers belonging to these categories. The difference between students currently at college and the actually practicing apprentice and expert teachers is clearly visible. The students' answers are mainly centred on the school and their career decision-making process. It has to be remarked that in the category "Decision was made on somebody's advice (family, friends, teachers)," memorable teachers are often included (mainly good memories, only one negative example was mentioned, and in this case, the respondent chose the profession to show that teaching can be done differently from his/her former teachers). There are also families mentioned where teaching is the traditional profession.

To a certain extent, idealistic professional calling was cited 51 times (including categories: "I always wanted to be a teacher," "I enjoy passing on knowledge," and "I like to help people"). About motivation, 36 respondents stated only that it was their own decision, and in 35 cases, the choice had nothing to do with the teaching profession ("I had no other choice" and "The vicinity of the school"). Some students remarked that they did not gain entrance to other universities and only teacher training colleges offered extended admission. The authors definitely do not want to indicate that those who have the calling will be excellent teachers and those who had no other alternative will fail. Nonetheless, it still noteworthy that almost one quarter of the respondents chose the profession for reasons having nothing to do with teaching. Even the seven respondents mentioning they like the subjects might not be studying in a teacher training institute because they want to be teachers.

The responses given by practising school teachers lack memories of choosing a school of higher education, and their responses are diversified by those motives that contribute to job satisfaction. It is interesting that, in quite a lot of cases, the teachers believe that they are the main source of knowledge. The highest proportion of the responses is about being fond of children and people, but almost as many decisions were made on somebody else's advice.

Q2: Students: Have you ever considered leaving college?

Apprentice and expert/mentor teachers: Would you like to change your career?

**Table 2 Considering quitting college/teaching profession**

	<b>Students/ novice teachers (N=147)</b>	<b>Apprenti- ce (N=74)</b>	<b>Mentor (N=87)</b>	<b>All (N=308)</b>
No	55%	64%	62%	60%

Table 2 shows that more than half of the respondents in all three career stages had never considered leaving the profession. Among others, the students were considering leaving college before graduation due to negative experiences, too many tasks, too difficult exams, financial problems, the atmosphere of the school, other students, or that they did not feel they would make a good teacher.

Apprentice and expert/mentor teachers were also asked what profession they would choose instead of teaching. As can be seen in Table 3, the answers were organised into 9 categories.

Q3: What would you like to do instead of teaching?

**Table 3 Preferred occupations instead of teaching**

	<b>Apprentice (N=74)</b>	<b>Mentor (N=87)</b>	<b>All (N=161)</b>
Blue-collar work	21	12	33
White-collar work	11	12	23
Other helper profession	9	14	23
Creative work/arts/ professional athlete	12	8	20
The same career in another way	5	14	19
Many other professions/ I currently have another type of job	5	5	10
Other job connected to teaching	3	4	7
Other	1	4	5

Table 3 indicates the frequency of the different job types the respondents named considering doing instead of teaching. Roughly one fifth of the respondents would choose a blue-collar profession (gardening, animal breeding, catering, car mechanic). The rest would do white-collar jobs, and a large proportion would work other helper jobs, occupations connected to the teaching profession, or something that is connected to the subject he or she teaches. There are quite a lot of job types listed in the answers seemingly having nothing to do with the teaching profession. However, a good teacher has to perform many roles in the classroom. Teachers are sometimes clowns, actors or actresses, parents, and competitors, and animal or plant breeding can be used as a metaphor for teaching. The listed professions indicate that these practicing teachers would choose jobs where the same characteristics and devotion are required.

Q4: Students: What do you think about your professional future? (N=149)

Apprentice and expert/mentor teachers: Were your career expectations fulfilled? (N=158)

**Table 4 Career expectations of students in teacher training**

Optimistic, confident	60%
Uncertain	20%
Pessimistic	13%
Will not be teacher	6%

The majority of the students were optimistic about their future career. Some of them planned further studies, and some already had a job offer. 33% of the respondents were pessimistic about their career prospects. They listed the well-known difficulty of finding a job. 6% would not work as a teacher.

**Table 5 Career fulfilment of apprentice and mentor teachers**

	<b>Apprentice (N=69)</b>	<b>Mentor (N=89)</b>	<b>All (N=158)</b>
Yes	62%	49%	55%
Partly	27%	48%	39%
No	11%	14%	13%

Table 5 shows that more than half of the practising teachers were fully satisfied with their career. Only a small minority considered themselves dissatisfied. Nonetheless, Table 6 indicates that there are many things practising teachers are dissatisfied with. The responses were grouped into 12 categories. Some of the categories included both positive and negative responses. These are indicated in the table. The table shows the frequency of the given reasons. It can be clearly seen that, at the different career stages, teachers perceive job satisfaction differently. Professional and career achievement is more important at later stages in the career, and the same can be stated about professional and social acknowledgement. The working environment is equally important for both age groups. Expert teachers complain about salary more often, while finding a job is a problem for apprentice teachers. It is remarkable that, although not many teachers claimed themselves dissatisfied with their career, some respondents of the expert/mentor group showed strong symptoms of burnout.

**Table 6 Reasons given for job satisfaction/dissatisfaction**

	<b>Apprentice (N=69)</b>	<b>Mentor (N=89)</b>	<b>All (N=158)</b>
Career/success/excellent superiors/professional achievement (positive & negative)	28	58	86
Attracted to the profession	19	33	52
Professional/social acknowledgement (positive & negative)	5	35	40
Colleagues/school management (positive & negative)	16	17	33
Parents/students (positive & negative)	16	11	27
Salary (negative)	4	17	21
Creativity/innovation (positive & negative)	-	15	15
Finding employment (positive & negative)	15	1	15
Work overload (negative)	7	5	12
Failure (negative)	2	5	7
No expectations	1	4	5
Interrupted by childbirth	1	2	3

Finally both age groups were asked about their private life goals.

Q5: What are your private life goals?



**Table 7 Private life goals**

	<b>Apprentice (N=77)</b>	<b>Mentor (N=76)</b>	<b>All (N=153)</b>
Family	52	54	106
Happiness, security	33	36	69
Financial security	16	14	30
Successful career	13	11	24
Health	7	16	23
Quality free time	5	13	18
I have already achieved what I wanted	6	8	14
Other	1	1	2

The authors strongly believe that that private and professional lives are interwoven, and they can either strengthen or weaken each other. Table 7 indicates the frequency of the given private life goals. The core desire of human beings is happiness, so it is no wonder both age groups mentioned family and happiness most often. Financial security is also part of a happy life. It also can be observed that, at a more mature age, health and quality free time become more important.

### 3. APPRENTICE TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

Apprentice teachers experience problems of starting a career, and for their future, it is essential that they identify problematic situations. We intended to find out what kind of typical pedagogical problems apprentice teachers encounter, how they can solve them, what resources they use, and how conscientious they are in their problem-solving. The respondents answered both open and closed questions (N= 105).

The first question was to find out what resources teachers use to solve problems occurring during lessons. From Table 8, we can see that the respondents mainly use their own problem-solving ideas and also rely on their colleagues' advice, and the institutional culture is also important in handling problematic situations.

**Table 8 Resources for problem-solving (N=105)**

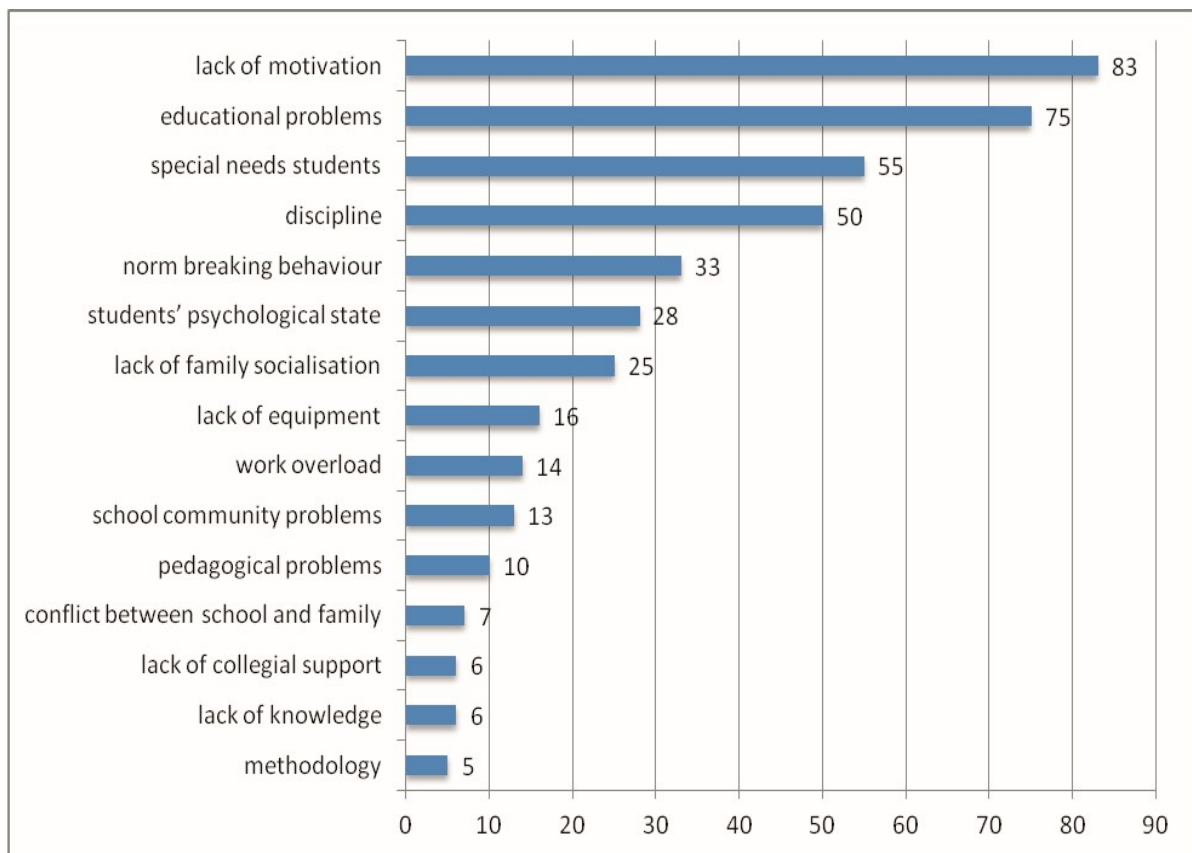
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
I use methods learnt from my former teachers	<b>16.8</b>	13.4855042	2016	0	65
I follow institutional practices	<b>21.9</b>	12.7498118	2626	0	50
I use my own resources	<b>32.3</b>	17.3732927	3873	10	100
I seek advice from my colleagues	<b>22.3</b>	9.88641373	2676	0	60
When problems occur, I am lost	<b>6.7</b>	8.03196956	809	0	50



The second question was to find out to what extent apprentice teachers had difficulties dealing with certain pedagogical situations. The 105 respondents identified 438 pedagogical problems they encountered most often. We asked open questions, and the same issue was examined with closed questions. Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale to what extent they agreed with the statements about different problems.

The answers were diverse when answering the open questions, including elements concerning classroom work, such as lack of student motivation, discipline, rule-breaking behaviour, lack of time, special needs students, differentiation, the students' psychological state, and so on. The closed questions resulted in the following answers: lack of time, demotivated students, differentiation, and work discipline.

Graph 2 indicates the frequency of the different problems. The results are entirely consistent with our earlier research on the difficulties of the apprentice teachers.



**Graph 2 The most frequent pedagogical problems (N=105)**

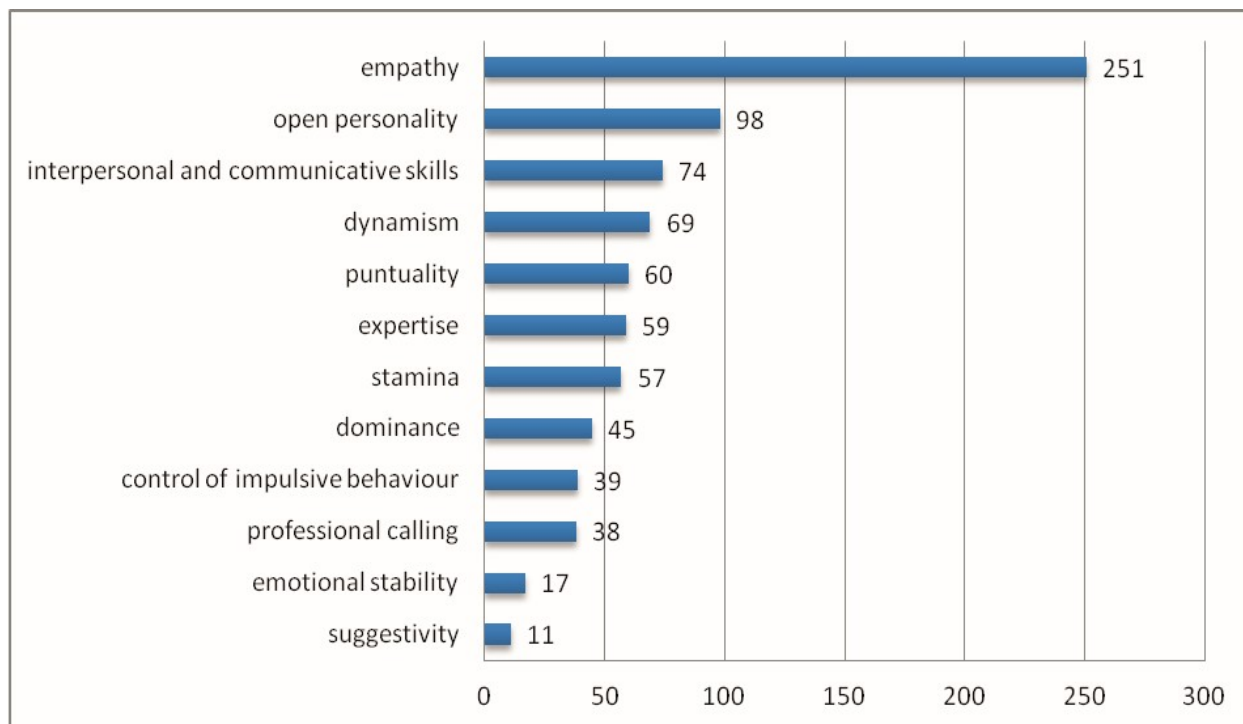
Table 9 indicates that apprentice teachers do not find it difficult to deal with the problems, but the answers also demonstrate a lack of proper problem-solving techniques. Though, to a certain extent, they can apply the various practices they learnt, they still need advice in difficult situations. The majority of the respondents claimed that they get help with handling different problems. On the whole, it can be stated that, though the respondents do not consider certain situations problematic, they are conscientious, to a varying extent, when they attempt to find explanations. Probably, as they lack experience, they do not possess the required habits.

**Table 9** *Apprentice teachers in problematic situations (N=105)*

I-strongly disagree; 4-strongly agree	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mode	Min	Max
I get help from my mentor teacher in solving pedagogical problems	3.55	0.752223518	4	1	4
I make good decisions when I solve problems during the lessons	3.17	0.582338782	3	2	4
I make conscious decisions when I choose problem solving techniques	3.10	0.81040071	3	1	4
I always find out why problems occur	3.01	0.664528251	3	1	4
I use good strategies for handling difficulties in the classroom	2.93	0.823969429	3	1	4
I need advice for handling difficult classroom situations more efficiently	2.75	0.942346289	3	1	4
When solving pedagogical problems I use the knowledge I gained at college	2.49	1.009254696	3	1	4
Teacher training provides adequate knowledge for solving pedagogical problems	2.06	0.942492446	2	1	4
Solving pedagogical problems (discipline, student activity, heterogeneous groups) in the classroom is difficult for me	1.90	0.840683836	2	1	4

We also asked the respondents to list and rank the 10 most important professional qualities. Out of the responses, we created 12 categories. The responses can be seen in Graph 3. From the responses, we can learn what qualities the respondents included in the list and also the importance of the listed features. The three most frequently mentioned qualities were the following: empathy, open personality, interpersonal and communicative skills. Considering the ranking, empathy can be taken as a basic quality, which includes characteristics like acceptance, understanding, identification, kindness, helpfulness, sympathy, patience, and good will. Open personality was ranked second, which includes interest, sensitivity, desire for knowledge, creativity, lateral thinking, and versatility.

Interpersonal and communicative skills were ranked third and include articulacy, rapport, sincerity, respect, and good problem-solving skills. The next ones in line were dynamism, punctuality, professional knowledge, stamina, dominance, impulsivity control, professional calling, emotional stability, and suggestiveness.



**Graph 3 Frequency of professional features and skills (N=105)**

We also focused our attention on the reflective practices of the apprentice teachers. We sought to discover the level of their reflective practices and how frequently their self-analysing activities occurred during and after the lesson. The main targets were to find out if teachers discussed their lessons with their colleagues, if they made notes and used the professional literature, and if they benefited from the gained experience in the future.

The above issues were mainly researched by closed questions, and the respondents had to mark their opinion on a 5-point Likert scale. It was followed by open questions about the same issues.

Table 10 indicates that apprentice teachers very often analyse their lesson afterwards, and they also analyse their classroom activity during the lesson.

**Table 10 Reflectivity in connection with classroom activity (N=105)**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mode	Min	Max
Do you analyse the teaching process during the lesson and decide which activities proved to be successful and which should be changed?	3.8	0.825	4	1	5
After the lesson, do you sometimes reflect on the successful and less successful elements of the lesson?	<b>4.7</b>	0.479	5	3	5
Can you benefit from your experience in your future work?	<b>4.4</b>	0.674	5	1	5

One of the possibilities of developing reflective practices is making pedagogical notes. Reading the notes helps for remembering the events, thinking them over, and reconsidering feelings and decisions. This is why we wanted to know the extent of the apprentice teachers' note-taking propensity. Table 11 indicates that apprentice teachers only make notes occasionally.

Reflectivity can be also improved by using professional literature resources when dealing with a problematic situation. We surveyed how often apprentice teachers seek help in professional books. Table 6 shows that apprentice teachers generally do not try to find help in professional books for solving problems that arise.

Collegial support is an essential factor in reflective practices, so we wanted to find out how often apprentice teachers discuss their classroom activity with their colleagues, as seeking support from fellow teachers and discussing problems can help in finding solutions. In Table 6, it can be seen that apprentice teachers seek the support of their colleagues only occasionally.

**Table 11** *Tendencies indicating improvements in reflectivity (N=105)*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Do you make notes on the issues you will consider when teaching the same material next year?	<b>3.16</b>	1.005	3	1	5
Have you ever read pedagogical books or professional literature on the subject when you needed help to solve a problem?	<b>3.14</b>	0.656	4	2	5
Do you discuss your lessons with your colleagues?	<b>3.37</b>	0.888	3	1	5

The responses clearly indicate that apprentice teachers use reflective practices. The introspective teachers will be able to revise their teaching activity and ensure effective classroom work in the long run. However, when we surveyed specific examples of reflective practices, we found that they use reflective practices only at a moderate level. This means that apprentice teachers do not possess the ability to use and understand high-level reflective practices.

## CONCLUSION

“...human beings ... believe that their lives are meaningful, that the things they do-- and consequently they themselves--are important and significant (Pines, 1993, 2000a). Frankl (1976) wrote that ‘the striving to find meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man’ (p. 154). Becker (1973) believed that people’s need to believe that the things they do are meaningful is their way of dealing with the angst caused by facing their mortality.” (Malach-Pines, Yafe-Yanai, 2001 p. 170). As the above lines also indicate, people would like to achieve happiness in life. Everybody wants to complete important tasks and to become important. Self-esteem and a self-composed personality can be achieved when the different aspects of one’s life are balanced, for example, when the two major selves of the human being – the professional self and the private self – are in harmony. By choosing the right profession, people can more probably lead a happy, contented life.

Before starting a teacher training college, students have concepts about the teaching profession based on their own school experience. At college, they have the opportunity to try themselves in the classroom and “students use this experience as a means of testing their career choice. First year students almost always comment on how comfortable they feel in the classroom and whether the children seem to like them. These early career concerns are

soon replaced by others related to the further exploration of their chosen career” (Tisher, 1990 in Hill, et al. 1995 p. 9).

Change is constant. Both the professional self and personal characteristics change with time. Studying the personality in different life stages and family life stages is not a new phenomenon, but it is also true that, though some generalization can be made, the circumstances in different times modify the overall consequences. Even Levinson in his two books about the different life stages – written 18 years apart – modified his overall conclusions, not only based on the gender differences (Levinson et al. *Seasons of a Man's Life* 1978, Levinson and Levinson, *Seasons of a Woman's Life* 1996).

Being a teacher is a very special profession, as teachers are responsible for the development of thousands of children, teenagers, and young adults. Moreover, the teacher's performance can have a delayed effect. So it is in everybody's best interest that self-composed teachers work in the classrooms. Csíkszentmihályi believes that workflow is the best method for maximising human capacity. If someone can find flow in his/her work and connections with people, his/her whole life can change for the best (Csíkszentmihályi, 2001, pp. 212 and 205). Thus, it is very important that reflective practices are applied not only in connection with the teaching activity but also in connection with personal matters. A teacher is responsible not only for his/her classroom activity but also for the soundness of his/her personality. We need caring teacher training and considerate faculty members to support and help each other.

As far as classroom work is concerned, we can concede that apprentice teachers are problem sensitive. Though they do not consider problematic situations as difficulties, they need help and support. Academic knowledge gained at teacher training does not offer solutions or resources for dealing with problems. Mentor teachers can help to offset these drawbacks.

The most revealing discoveries of the present study can be connected to the responses about the professional self of the apprentice teachers. They indicate the need for forming a self-reflective teacher personality. This should start during teacher training and manifest itself more intensely. For practising teachers, it is advisable to form professional self-help groups contributing to the development and better understanding of one's professional self.

Teachers in teacher training should recognise that the basics of reflective practices should be included in teacher training curricula. Moreover, this cannot be acquired only at academic levels, but the curricula should include students getting involved in reflective practices and professional recording of observations. Making a portfolio can be beneficial in this process. However, we have to concede that this practice has not been widespread, neither in elementary nor in kindergarten teacher training. The reflective practices and their development should be a more significant part of teacher training curricula.

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